



South East Region Conservation Alliance Inc.

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FIRST AUSTRALIAN NATIVE FOREST WOOD PELLET PLANT SET TO SHORE UP LOGGING AND INCREASE RISK OF FIRE INFERNO IN SOUTH EAST

Australian conservationists are rallying against an imminent decision to approve the country's first native forest wood pellet plant in southern NSW.

Leading conservationist and businesswoman Prue Acton, from the South East Region Conservation Alliance (SERCA) said approval of the pellet plant at Eden meant the native logging industry in East Gippsland and in south east of NSW would continue to destroy vital carbon stores and habitat for years to come.

Ms Acton said the company behind the wood pellet plant development application, South East Fibre Exports, was owned by Japan's Nippon Paper and has been exporting up to 1 million tonnes of woodchips each year to Asia from the port of Eden, in southern NSW.

"The woodchip industry ran on the mantra for many years that only forest waste was being wood-chipped. We now know from government and industry sources that this was never the case, and that over 90 per cent of all native forests logged in the region is actually wood-chipped.

"The woodchipping industry is now expecting us and the public to believe them when they say only 'mill waste' will be used to make the pellets." Ms Acton said there was a growing international market for pellets for heating and energy largely based on the myth that it was a renewable industry, but she said international prices had been falling for the past three years.

"At a point in time where West Australia's Plantation Energy pellet plant at Albany is closing its doors, the Eden woodchip mill is desperately hoping that native forest wood pellets will give it a future." Ms Acton said a decision about the pellet plant would be made by the conservative regional Bega Valley Shire Council next Tuesday, she said last year the Council gave the go ahead to the pellet plant only to have it knocked out in the Land and Environment Court.

She said the communities of the south east should be particularly concerned about the proposal. "This comes at a time when studies are showing logged forests are more likely to burn intensely than protected forests. This should worry the people of south eastern Australia, who are already living in a high risk area, with climate change due to cause more droughts and fires."

It also comes at a time when climate scientists say we must protect and restore the carbon stocks in native forests, Ms Acton said. "To add another unsustainable industry in this particular area, which needs to transition from logging, is madness and dangerous. South east Australia could become an inferno if logging continues to dry out the forest floors," she said.

An online petition asking Councillors to not approve the wood pellet plant can be found at: http://www.chipstop.savetheforests.org.au/forests_in_the_furnace.htm

Contact: Prue Acton 02-64945144 or Harriet Swift 0414 908 997